Choco Bombs

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/15549537.

Rating:
General Audiences

Archive Warning:
No Archive Warnings Apply

Category:
Gen

Fandom:
Batman - All Media Types

Relationship:
Tim Drake & Dick Grayson

Characters:
Tim Drake, Dick Grayson

Additional Tags:
Hurt/Comfort, Emotional Hurt/Comfort, Alfred Pennyworth is off-screen, Bruce Wayne is "Dead", Dick Grayson Needs a Hug, Big Brother Dick Grayson, Little brother Tim Drake, Forehead Touching, Batfam Week 2018, Soft Boi Brothers

Language:
English

Series:
Part 4 of The Returnverse

Stats:
Published: 2018-08-03 Words: 2,324 Chapters: 1/1

Choco Bombs

by lurkinglurkerwholurks

Summary

BatFam Week 2018, Day Six. Prompt: Hurt/Comfort

I present to you all one completely platonic brother-to-brother hurt/comfort, complete with at least one (1) instance of forehead touching and one (1) instance of gentle forehead kissing. Because Soft Boi Brothers are important to me.

——Can be read as a standalone——

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

There was a person in his kitchen. There wasn't supposed to be. Tim shifted his grip on his tablet. He would hate to damage the device, but if his choice was between ninja star-ing the tablet at the intruder's head or launching a weaponless attack in his pajamas, he would sacrifice what he must.

The person in the kitchen turned. For a moment, Tim's breath caught as the dim recessed light illuminated black hair, muscular shoulders clad in a subtly expensive button-up, and a small, warm smile.

Bruce.

But then Tim caught sight of the face. Just Dick.

...Dick was in his apartment, uninvited.

Tim considered throwing his tablet anyways. Instead, he flipped on the full kitchen lights. Dick winced in the fluorescent glare.

"There's this new fad going around," Tim said before Dick could speak. "It's called knocking. Big hit with your fellow millennials. You should try it sometime."

The hesitant smile on Dick's face flickered, faded, but didn't entirely go out. "Hey to you too, little brother."

*Oh sure, **now** I'm little brother.*

Tim's lips tightened as he snatched at the spiteful thought. That wasn't fair. Dick had always called him brother. Tim could give him that much. Dick just hadn't backed that up with actions in a while.

"What do you want, Dick?" Tim asked. He didn't wait for the answer before brushing by Dick into the kitchen, tablet clutched firmly beneath his arm.

"Nothing." The answer came quickly, weakly. The skin between Tim's shoulder blades prickled. He didn't know how to navigate this new terrain with Dick. He didn't like tension, but he didn't know how to fix it without rolling over, and he wouldn't give in. *He* was the injured party here, not Dick.

Leather shoes shuffled against the linoleum behind Tim as Dick shifted his weight. "I just... wanted to check on you."

"You could have called," Tim pointed out.

“Would you have picked up?” Dick asked. His voice was soft and unaccusatory. Tim wished he had the decency to sound angry and make Tim’s own hurt easier to carry.

Tim didn’t answer. He set the tablet down on the counter, then pulled open the cabinet and rifled around for his favorite bowl.

“Well,” he said, voice muffled by the particle board shelves, “here I am. I’m alive. You’ve checked. Mission accomplished.”

Bowl located, Tim turned around and noticed with a spiteful zing of satisfaction the way Dick pinched the bridge of his nose. But then Dick noticed him noticing and straightened, smile plastered back on his face.

“Nice try. You know I have to at least look in your fridge to report back to Alfred. He’s convinced you’re slowly starving to death without him.”

“I’m fine,” Tim said, even as he opened his fridge and made no effort to block Dick’s view of takeout cartons and pizza boxes. He plucked the jug of milk from the top shelf and shut the door. “It’s hardly my first time taking care of myself.”

Tim had learned to cook as a kid. Even though his parents made sure they left enough money for delivery food, he’d liked the idea of filling his big, empty house with warmth and the smell of a good meal. He just... hadn’t had the energy over the last few weeks, that was all.

“What’re you having?” Dick asked. “Choco Bombs?”

Tim held up the bright orange box in answer. It was one of Dick’s favorite cereals, too. He waited for Dick to ask for a bowl, too, but no request came. Weird, but Tim was grateful Dick could at least read the room that much.

Tim peeked up through his lashes at his brother as he poured the cereal. Dick looked... tired. The older man was leaning against the kitchen table, propped by his hip and his hand. He was staring off at nothing, some distant spot to Tim’s left, eyes unfocused and troubled. The vigilante life was known for causing wan faces and dark smudges under eyes, but Dick looked worse than normal. Even the fact that he was silent for this long was troubling.

“Dick?” Tim finally said.

“Hmm?” Dick jerked to attention, elbow buckling before he snapped upright. “Oh. Sorry, Timbo, just... zoning out there, I guess.”

Tim frowned, concern battling with the need for affronted distance. “You feeling okay?”

Dick scrubbed the back of his hand against his forehead. “Yeah, yeah, I’m fine. It’s just been a long week.”

Tim fidgeted his spoon between his thumb and forefinger. “The, uh, gig more intense than you thought?” *Demon brat giving you a harder time than you anticipated, Dickie dear?*

Dick sighed and gave Tim a tired smile. “No, not more than I thought.” But as bad as he had anticipated, was the unspoken truth. Tim knew Dick hadn’t wanted to take up the cowl but had done so out of duty to Gotham and loyalty to Bruce.

Tim chewed on his bottom lip, considering. He wanted to point out that the job would’ve been easier if Dick had kept a fully trained Robin by his side. He wanted to give an uncaring shrug and show Dick the door. *That’s rough, buddy. See ya, wouldn’t wanna be ya!*

He wanted to sit and talk with his brother like he used to.

Tim opened his mouth to speak. Even he wasn’t sure what was going to come out of his mouth, but Dick beat him to it.

“I, uh, I should, I should go,” Dick stammered. “I just wanted to check on you, make sure you were okay. You were right. You were right, I should have called.” He swiped a hand over his face, for a moment hiding suspiciously bright eyes, then pushed off the counter and turned toward the door.

Tim stood immobile for two agonizing heartbeats, then lunged around the counter.

“Dick, wait,” he began, fingers encircling Dick’s wrist just as the other man reached the front door.

Dick didn’t turn, but instead leaned forward and rested his forehead against the closed door. “Mm?”

“Will you look at me?” Tim demanded. He yanked on Dick’s arm once, like a kid throwing a temper tantrum. Tim’s ears burned, but he kept his focus on his brother.

Dick turned slowly, shuffling as if his bones hurt him. He sighed and rested his back against the door. “Yeah, Tim?”

Tim’s eyes narrowed, then widened. Up close, Dick looked even worse. He reached up to touch the bright splotch of color on Dick’s otherwise pale cheek. Dick jerked his head to the side, then grimaced, pressing the pads of his fingers to his temple.

“You’re sick!” Tim accused.

“Tim,” Dick sighed. “It’s nothing. I’m fine. It’s just a little headache.”

“You’re sick!” Tim said again. If he stopped and thought about it, he wouldn’t be able to say why he was so outraged. Maybe because Dick had always been so flamboyant about his illnesses, whining and carrying on and seeking attention from anyone who passed by. If Dick wasn’t doing that now, did that mean he didn’t think Tim’s comfort worth his time?

Tim stretched his hand out and tried to place it on Dick’s forehead.

“I’m not!” Dick snapped and smacked Tim’s hand away, then had to brace himself against the wall as he lost his balance.

Tim stared, horrified. Dick’s natural grace was legendary to the point of ridicule. His lack of clumsiness was an in-family meme. Tim couldn’t remember ever seeing Dick stumble, except—

Tim lunged forward and grabbed Dick’s shirt.

“Hey!” Dick squawked as Tim quickly but methodically checked him for injuries.

“Come on, Dick, ‘fess up. Where are you bleeding, you big idiot?” Tim demanded. It would be just like this stupid family and its stupid machismo for Dick to saunter into Tim’s apartment with a gaping bullet hole in his back or half his skull gone, and the longer it took Tim to find whatever it was he was hiding, the more his blood pressure skyrocketed.

“Tim, Tim, TIM!” Dick shouted into Tim’s name into his face. He had grabbed Tim’s wrist and held his searching hands still.

The corners of Dick’s mouth tipped upward slightly, like doing more required more effort than he could afford. Leaning forward, he bent and rested his forehead against Tim’s. “I’m not injured, little brother.

I'm alright."

Tim's fingers flexed uselessly as he forced himself to take a breath. "But you're not," he murmured.

"Tim—"

"You're not," Tim insisted. It wasn't that Tim thought he was sick. Dick's forehead felt a little warm but not alarmingly feverish. It was something worse than that, something about the faded blue eyes hovering inches from Tim's own.

"You're not sleeping, are you?" Tim asked.

Dick was silent for a beat, then pulled away to lean against the door again. "Some."

"Dick."

"What do you want from me, Tim?" Dick pushed himself off the door and past Tim into the heart of the small apartment. "I'm busy. I had a full-time job that wasn't exactly the definition of a cushy nine-to-five, and now..."

Now he was trying to be Batman on top of being Officer Grayson. Worse, he was trying to be *Bruce*. Even Bruce could barely sustain being Bruce. Tim watched with mounting concern as Dick wobbled his way to the couch and sat down heavily.

"You should take a break," Tim began as he followed his brother and gingerly sat beside him. "Just a couple nights. Gotham will survive."

Dick shook his head, black strands of hair swishing limply against his forehead. "I can't."

"Dick, you have—"

"I can't." Dick rubbed his palms up the sides of his face and into his hair, making the already mussed mess stand on end. "There's no one else. Gotham is my responsibility now. Damian is my responsibility. I can't screw that up."

"But you—"

"I can't stop, Tim." Dick, hunched over his own knees, looked up and fixed Tim with a haunted, empty stare. "I can't afford to. If I stop, I'll... I'll start to think. About everything. And I can't..."

Tim's horror mushroomed as Dick's shoulders began to quake.

"I'm sorry, I know I screwed up with how I handled you and Damian. I don't know what else I could have done, but I know—And now you're not talking to me, and Jason is AWOL, and it's like I've lost my brother *again*, but it's both of you this time. Damian hates me. Alfred... I've never seen him look so old. And my dad is dead. *Again*."

Tim knew. They all knew, except for Damian. They had all lost parents before. But Tim, Cass, and Jason had all had... *complicated* was too small a word to cover their relationships with their biological parents. Tim and Cass had come to Bruce as teenagers, already most of the way to adulthood and independence. Jason had come younger, but their relationship had fractured in the middle and had yet to be repaired.

But Dick. Dick had adored his parents, and into the jagged hole their deaths had left, Bruce had appeared and filled the gap to keep Dick from falling after them. Regardless of their weird, part-paternal, part-fraternal relationship, Bruce really had been Dick's *dad* for the majority of Dick's life. And now he was gone too.

Tim knew. But he couldn't imagine.

My dad is dead.

As soon as the words tumbled from Dick's lips and into the still air, the tears followed. They were silent, as so few things about Dick were, but full and weighty. They slipped through Dick's fingers as he pressed his hands to his face, running down his arms like blood from an open wound.

Tim let him cry. He didn't know what else to do. He couldn't comfort Dick with his own, contentious belief that Bruce still lived. He couldn't tell him that everything would be alright, because nothing was alright.

So instead Tim placed a hesitant hand on Dick's shoulder and let him cry. When Dick turned, still hunched and quaking, Tim gathered him close. And when Dick wept great, rasping sobs into Tim's chest, Tim let his own tears fall into Dick's hair.

Dick cried himself to sleep. Later, Tim wondered if Dick had just been waiting for someone strong enough to hold him together as he fell apart. Tim didn't consider himself strong, but with Bruce gone, he supposed Dick's options were limited. All Dick really needed was

someone to assure him that, for right now, he wasn't alone, and that was something Tim could manage.

Once Dick had collapsed, crumpled and waterlogged, onto Tim's bed, Tim returned to the kitchen and snagged his phone off the counter. It rang only twice.

"Hey Alfred, it's me. Just letting you know that Dick's here. He won't be patrolling tonight. No, no, he's not hurt. He's... He just needs the night off. I can call—Oh, you will? Okay, thanks."

Even though the old butler wasn't near to see him, Tim's eyes dropped to the countertop, and he traced an old stain with his fingertip as he listened to the voice on the other end of the line.

"I'm alright. I know. I know it's been a while. I'm sorry, I just needed —I know. Yeah. Yes." A small, bruised smile. "I miss you, too. I'll try to come by. Tomorrow? No, I know I—Well. We'll see. Maybe. Okay. Okay. I will. Goodnight, Alfred."

It wasn't the night he had planned when he had first shuffled out in search of a late-night snack. The milk, long-forgotten on the counter, would have to be thrown out, and the cereal put back in the cabinet, unopened. But as Tim crawled into bed next to his softly snoring brother and studied the slowly easing lines and drying tear stains on Dick's familiar face, he decided that he didn't much mind.

Quickly, shyly, Tim stretched his neck and kissed Dick's forehead. "Goodnight, big brother."

End Notes

Want to see Tim and his brother truly work things out? Check out The Return: https://archiveofourown.org/works/23726839/chapters/58710001#workskin

2025 ETA: I've started posting "behind the scenes" looks at the process of writing fics over on Tumblr. Here's the one for this fic: https://lurkinglurkerwholurks.tumblr.com/post/726107280967335936/choco-bombs

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!